

THE IMPACT OF PEER MENTORING ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIVE
PRACTICES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine if undergraduates serving as peer mentors in a learning community attribute the mentorship to developmental assistance in the 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership. The participants of this study serve as mentors to first generation college students at Texas A&M University. A qualitative approach was used, relying on Personal-Best Leadership reflections and short answer responses to obtain data. This study is rooted in Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and Kouzes and Posner's Student Leadership Challenge. There were 37 mentors who participated during the training in which the data for this study was collected. Mentors, through reflection, showed evidence that through serving as a mentor they believe their leadership skills were effected in a positive way.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all those who have been a mentor to someone. Mentors are like guardian angels and are to be cherished. I also would like to dedicate this thesis to all dyslexics who have persevered in academia. It is not easy, but we too have much to learn.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Setting

Student development is not a new concept. In fact, for as long as there have been institutions of higher education; student development has taken place. The development of students will continue as long as the doors to these institutions remain open.

However, the process by which these students are developed has changed, as the needs of the students have changed. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn, in their Second Edition of *Student Development in College Theory, Research, and Practice* state that, “The expectations, needs, and developmental issues of a fifteen-year-old, upper-class white male student attending Harvard in the 1700s...were certainly different from those of a first-generation Laotian American woman attending a community college in the early twenty-first century...” (2010, p. 5). With the needs of students constantly changing, it is imperative that colleges and universities evolve to meet the complex needs of students.

Although the desire to develop competent and well-rounded students is not a new desire (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969), over the last two decades there has been a significant increase in the number of studies done on college student leadership development (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives, Dugan, & Owen, 2011). This rapid increase in the desire for a more in-depth look at student leadership development stems from the need to ensure that students are well-rounded and able to

make positive contributions to society. The National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA) addressed this need in Priority One:

Colleges and universities seek to develop students who will be contributing members to society, and many institutions emphasize leadership in their mission statements (Astin and Astin, 2000; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). As such, many leadership initiatives, both curricular and co-curricular, exist on college campuses to facilitate leadership development. We contend that addressing the process of learning and developing leadership is just as, if not more, important than addressing the curricular topics of Leadership Education. (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 5)

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 101 colleges and/or universities identify leadership skills as a primary outcome of undergraduate education (Meacham & Gaff, 2006). One such institution of higher education that explicitly states leadership as a desired trait for undergraduate and graduate students alike is Texas A&M University. Texas A&M University was founded in 1876 as a result of the Morrill Act of 1862 (Texas A&M University, n.d.-c). In the 140 years since the inception of this institution, there have been numerous changes as the institution has grown and modernized, such as the creation of new majors and fields of study, the removal of the military service requirement for all students, and the inclusion of female students. Additionally, the “Core Values” states that “[Texas A&M’s] purpose statement carries with it the responsibility, the traditions and the forward-thinking of Texas A&M exemplified by all who are associated with the university” and can best be described by the use of Texas A&M’s six core values: Excellence, Integrity, Leadership, Loyalty, Respect, and Selfless Service. (Texas A&M University, n.d.-a, para. 1)

While 101 colleges/universities (Meacham & Gaff, 2006) specifically identify leadership skills as a desired learning outcome mentioned in their mission statements, Dugan and Komives (2007) discuss the importance of the shifts in leadership paradigm and the need for “models and theories that specifically targeted the developmental needs of college students” (Dugan and Komives, 2007, p. 6). In their national study of developing leadership capacity in college students, Dugan and Komives identified specific categories from the assessment of leadership outcomes: Leadership Outcomes, Change Over Time, Pre-College Experience Matters, Leadership Shows Moderate Differences, Racial and Ethnic Groups Differ, Openness to *Change* is Greater for Marginalized Groups of Students, Discussions about Socio-Cultural Issues Matter a Great Deal, Mentoring Matters, Campus Involvement Matters, Service Matters, Positional Leadership Roles Develop Leadership, and Formal Leadership Programs Matter (Dugan & Komives, 2007). These twelve outcomes have been found to affect the development of leadership in college students. These outcomes provide insight as to what factors contribute to the development of leadership competency in students. This study found that college students are being offered many different ways to develop as leaders. Participating in a student-led organization, holding a position of leadership in an organization, participating on a sports team, volunteering, engaging in open discussions with students of different backgrounds (ethnic groups, socio-economic class, religion, etc.), and identifying and engaging with a mentor are just a few activities that allow college students to develop their leadership.

In regards to developing engaged and contributing students, Colvin and Ashman (2010) discussed the two most common instances where students assist students: peer tutoring and peer mentoring. The creation and implementation of peer mentoring programs focus on assisting students as they transition from college and work toward success in their field of study. Peer mentoring consists of an individual with experience and/or success in an area, the mentor, assisting a less experienced individual, the mentee. The mentor-mentee interaction encourages and supports personal growth and development for both the mentee and the mentor (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). The role of a peer mentor is therefore, an opportunity to lead and guide their mentees. Thus, in a collegiate setting, peer mentoring is an experience that allows more advanced or experienced undergraduate students the opportunity for personal growth through the development of their leadership skills. To better understand how peer mentoring allows for such development, exploration of the assessment of leadership development must be examined.

Posner noted “Leadership development is now an integral part of the educational program of college students....” (2012, p. 221). With curricular and co-curricular developmental and educational opportunities available to students, “Those students who practice leadership are more effective from the perspective of their constituents than those who don’t engage as frequently in key leadership behaviors and actions” (Posner, 2012, p 232). Dugan and Komives (2007) identified mentoring relationships as one way to enrich campus leadership programs. They recommend developing processes for students to receive one-on-one attention in the college environment. The development

of peer-based mentorships is a viable option for providing experienced undergraduate students the opportunity to lead by mentoring less experienced peers.

At Texas A&M University, Foundations of Continued Undergraduate Success [FOCUS] is a learning community whose purpose is to assist freshmen Regents' Scholars with their transition into college life. The office of Scholarship and Financial Aid defines the Regents' Scholarship as a scholarship that assists approximately 600 first-generation college students each year in reaching their educational goals at Texas A&M University (Texas A&M University, n.d.-d). Regents' Scholars are required to participate as members of the learning community their first year at Texas A&M University and have the opportunity in their second, third, and fourth years to apply to serve as peer mentors for subsequent groups of program participants. The FOCUS webpage (Texas A&M University, n.d.-b) describes FOCUS as an academic program that utilizes peer mentors who guide freshmen through their first year of college.

The selection of peer mentors is a four-step process:

Step One:

- Students who are considering applying should outwardly display an interest in assisting freshmen through their first year of college by: seeking opportunities to help others, inquiring about the mentor selection process, actively participating in the FOCUS program, etc. Mentor applicants are not limited to students who participated in the FOCUS program as freshmen.
- Willing to build meaningful relationships with these students.
- Willing to take on a leadership role.

Step Two:

- Submit an application that consists of open-ended questions, and a completed recommendation form.

Step Three:

- Complete an in-person interview, in which each applicant is interviewed by at least two FOCUS staff members.
 - The staff members may choose questions from a pre-approved packet to ensure uniformity.

Step Four:

- Potential mentors must participate in Team Assessment Day [TAD].
- Applicants are assigned teams that are supervised by current mentors, and are asked to complete teambuilding tasks.
- This allows FOCUS staff a glimpse of how applicants work with peers and approach challenges.
- Each team is given facilitation topics and each applicant must facilitate on the topic they are assigned. This provides current mentors and staff an idea of each applicant's ability to think quickly and critically, but also gives insight into the applicants' ability to facilitate conversation.

The peer mentors are then selected by staff after reviewing interview comments, compiling scores from TAD, and reviewing each applicant's knowledge and participation with the program. Each year there are approximately 50 undergraduate students who apply to become peer mentors. Of these 50 students, 40 to 45 will be

selected as peer mentors to provide mentoring to the nearly 300 FOCUS freshmen who enter the university each year. The number of applicants selected as peer mentors varies depending on the projected number of incoming freshmen and any changes that may be made to the FOCUS program.

The peer mentors in FOCUS center their interactions on what their specific group of freshmen need and serve as “transition resources” (Texas A&M University, n.d.-b). FOCUS mentors are given the opportunity to hone their mentoring skills, develop professionally, and receive on-the-job-training in a safe and supportive environment. These mentors meet with their coordinator once a week to review the material they will present and facilitate during the In-FOCUS Seminar, a weekly seminar required for Regents’ Scholars in the program. Each week a different mentor is assigned as leader. Before each coordinator meeting, the lead mentor must learn the material, delegate tasks to team members, and complete a meeting agenda. During these meetings, coordinators provide feedback on work from the previous week and allow mentors to voice concerns or address any issues.

Aside from the weekly coordinator meeting, mentors are required to attend a two-hour monthly training session focused on professional development. During these sessions, FOCUS coordinators address group issues, guest speakers are brought in, or group enhancing activities are conducted. Mentors are also encouraged to inform FOCUS staff of any developmental activities or opportunities that they would like to participate in or have access to. Aside from formal trainings and mentor-coordinator meetings, mentors select a small group of no more than ten freshmen out of each team’s

seminar whom they agree to mentor personally. Having mentors select their mentees provides mentors the opportunity to reach out to students they feel they will connect with or to whom they are better able to provide guidance. Mentors are required to meet with their selected freshmen one-on-one at least twice a semester. These one-on-one meetings provide the freshmen the opportunity to ask questions or discuss sensitive topics, while providing the mentor a chance to establish trust and a personal mentor relationship.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to better understand and describe how students who are serving as FOCUS mentors perceive their development of leadership through this experience. This study evaluated each FOCUS mentor's written reflections regarding their "Personal-Best Leadership Experience" (Kouzes & Posner, 2013), their written reflections regarding their Student Leadership Practices Inventory [SLPI] scores, and how they relate to activities as a mentor in FOCUS with the goal to evaluate the impact of FOCUS on the leadership development of these college students.

The question under investigation was:

Does the involvement of undergraduate students' participation as FOCUS mentors have an impact on their development and implementation of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership?

The following research questions will be addressed through this study:

1. How do FOCUS mentors describe their Personal-Best Leadership Experience as a FOCUS mentor?

2. How do FOCUS mentors perceive the impact of being a FOCUS peer mentor on the development of their leadership behaviors?

Definitions of Terms

While many of the terms used in this study may be easily defined by a simple Internet search or the use of context clues, there are several terms and/or acronyms that are specific to the FOCUS Learning Community and its culture.

Student Development: “the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (Rodgers, 1990, p. 27).

Leadership: “Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 2).

Leadership Development: “refers to almost every form of growth or stage of development in the life cycle that promotes, encourages, and assists in one’s leadership potential” (Brungardt, 1997, p. 83).

Leadership Education: The NLERA defines leadership education as: “the pedagogical practice of facilitating leadership learning in an effort to build human capacity and is informed by leadership theory and research. It values and is inclusive of both curricular and co-curricular educational contexts” (Andenoro et al., 2013 p. 3).

Leadership Training: A more specific aspect of Leadership Development and Leadership Education. Leadership training takes a more specific look at the development of a specific trait or skill (Brungardt, 1997).

Learning Community: Members of a learning community are encouraged to use other members as resources and to begin to think critically. Learning communities often provide participants with a sense of belonging, in turn making them more likely to complete their education (Cox, 2001; Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2012).

FOCUS Learning Community: FOCUS offers a learning community experience to first-year students who are Regents' Scholarship recipients in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Veterinary Medicine, the Department of Biology in the College of Science, and the Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Public Health. Mentors interact weekly with first-year students as leaders of the non-credit In FOCUS sessions (Texas A&M University, n.d.-b).

Peer Mentoring: "...an assistive relationship in which two individuals of similar age and or/experience work together, either formally or informally, to fulfill some kind of informational and/or emotional need" (Terrion, Phillion, & Leonard, 2007).

FOCUS Mentors: Undergraduate students who have completed their first year at Texas A&M University, with a 2.75 or higher GPA. They work closely with FOCUS staff and mentor freshmen through their first year of college.

Returning Mentor: Within the context of this study, a returning mentor is an undergraduate student who has served as a FOCUS mentor for more than two academic semesters.

First-Year Mentor: Within the context of this study a first-year mentor is an undergraduate student who has successfully completed their freshmen year at Texas A&M University, and will serve as a FOCUS mentor.

In-FOCUS Session [IFS]: A once-weekly, mandatory seminar for students participating in the FOCUS Learning Community. Topics covered include, but are not limited to: Note Taking, Cultural Identity, Teambuilding, Campus Culture, Study Skills, and Coping with Homesickness.

Basic Assumptions

This study was conducted under several assumptions:

1. Both First-Year and Returning Mentors have actively participated and engaged in leadership and development during their time as mentors.
2. Serving as a FOCUS mentor has had an impact on the development of Kouzes and Posner's 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership.
3. Mentors participating in this study answered questions to the best of their ability, and utilized critical reflection when providing responses.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is one of limited scope. It examined undergraduates serving as mentors for one undergraduate learning community, and how serving that learning community has assisted mentors in developing their leadership capacity. While this study examines how mentors describe their experience as having helped them to develop their leadership capacity, it does not examine the effect of the mentorship on the mentee.

Due to this study's qualitative design, it is not generalizable. Rather, thick description and representative quotes from participants have been used to enable the reader to determine applicability to their individual context.

Importance of the Study

“A great need exists to understand better the unique nature of college student leadership development as well as how the college experience contributes to that process” (Dugan & Komives, 2007, p. 7). Although there is literature available on the benefits of mentoring (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Douglass, Smith, & Smith, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007), there is a lack of research specifically on the impact of peer-mentorship on the development of leadership qualities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For this study, the literature review will focus on studies that pertain to student development in college, student leadership development, measuring student leadership development, and leadership development through peer mentoring. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained student development in terms of vectors as opposed to stages to show that at any given time a student may be advancing in more than one area of development at a time. Dugan and Komives (2007) found four trends that are assisting in the development of leadership in undergraduate students: the expansion of curricular and co-curricular leadership programs, focused theoretical and conceptual leadership models, professionalization in leadership education, and leadership research. Kouzes and Posner (2013), developed a Student Leadership Practices Inventory to provide students with a tool to evaluate which of the 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership they are utilizing most frequently and effectively. Colvin and Ashman (2010), studied the risks and benefits associated with undergraduate peer mentoring and its effect on the development of leadership. Theories that were found to shed light on these topics include: Chickering and Reisser (1993) Seven Vectors of Student Development, Transformational Leadership (Northouse, 2013), the 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership (2014), and Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984).

Student Development in College

Student development has been a desired outcome of institutions of higher education for as long as there have been students. While there have been many changes in culture and social norms, as well as rapid advances in technology and educational practices, the desire for well-rounded students has been and will remain a desired outcome of higher education (Evans et al., 2010). With these rapid changes in the world, student affairs professionals have attempted to adapt to meet the needs of each new era of student.

Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993) provided an in-depth look at how college students develop by using seven vectors: developing confidence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing identity. The significance in the usage of the term vector over stage in terms of developmental status is that it indicates that in order to develop in one vector, a student does not have to master any of the previous vectors. This means that, a student may be developing in more than once vector at a time, as opposed to mastering one competence completely in order to move to the next. Chickering and Reisser state that their model “does not portray development as one predominant challenge or crisis resolution after another, each invariably linked to specific ages” (1993, p.34). Rather than placing students in a certain developmental category based on age or education level, a vector model provides an idea of how far developed a student may be in each particular vector. As a student navigates through

each vector, reflection of experiences and interactions with others may help a student see a situation from a different prospective than before.

Developing Competence

In college, students develop three types of competencies: intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). When a student is developing intellectual competence, they are learning to use the knowledge they already possess in more critical ways; they are “building a repertoire of skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45). When students begin to develop physical and manual skills, they are building competence in areas such as sports and creative arts, and are developing self-discipline. The third competency in this vector is interpersonal competence. When students begin to gain competence in this area, they are not only gaining experience in listening and conversing, but also in gauging appropriate responses and how to effectively work within a group setting (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 46). The overarching theme of this vector in terms of student development is, “Students’ overall sense of competence increases as they learn to trust their abilities, receive accurate feedback from others, and integrate their skills into a stable self-assurance” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 46). As students navigate through this vector they begin to feel more confident in their abilities and will begin to display more competence in their daily lives.

Managing Emotions

In this vector, the goal is for students to develop awareness and some level of control over their emotions. College students begin their journey through this vector when they begin to become aware of their feelings (i.e. fear, anxiety, shame, joy, excitement, etc.). The goal is not to deny the existence of certain feelings, but to recognize that they are there and have an impact on the development of each student. Further development takes place once the student begins to seek and understand their emotions and find ways to cope with them before they become overwhelming. “Awareness of emotions increases when students learn to identify and accept feelings as normal reactions to life experience” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 97). In this vector, Chickering and Reisser briefly discuss the need for mentors in the lives of students to assist in times of emotional distress (1993).

Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence

In this vector there are three main components through which students will move as they develop: emotional independence, instrumental independence, and interdependence. Emotional independence in this context is the freedom from the need for reassurance and a sense of responsibility for the students’ interests and goals. Instrumental independence is a focus on the development of problem-solving skills and the ability of the student to be flexible and resourceful. As students develop through this particular vector, they are beginning to need less direct instruction and begin to seek ownership of their decisions (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). The development of autonomy begins to come to completion when the student is no longer focusing solely

on their own reality, but realizes that the outside world directly and indirectly affects their life. At this point in the development of the student, there is a realization that “interpersonal context broadens to include the community, the society, [and] the world” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 47).

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

As students develop in this vector they begin to accept differences in peers and gain tolerance for differences, as well as begin to develop relationships that are healthy and enduring. According to Chickering and Reisser “development in this vector involves (1) tolerance and appreciation of differences [and] (2) capacity for intimacy” (1993, p. 48). When students begin development of this vector they are beginning to lean less on stereotypes and more on their own experiences when making decisions. Students are beginning to appreciate difference rather than fear the unknown. Movement through this vector also means that students are learning what a mature relationship feels like. They begin to seek equality and less dominance, and begin to develop long-lasting relationships that will endure through time and difficulty (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Establishing Identity

While a student must not master one vector to begin developing the next, the fifth vector (Establishing Identity) is affected by where a student may be developmentally in the vectors previously mentioned. “Development of identity is the process of discovering with what kinds of experience, at what levels of intensity and frequency, we resonate in satisfying, in safe, or in self-destructive fashion” (Chickering

& Reisser, 1993, p. 49). The development of one's identity is an extremely complex process. As students navigate this vector, they begin to look at themselves as a unit and not segmented parts that are working to simply function. Students begin to look at self-image, gender, sexual orientation, sense of self, develop response to feedback, and seek to gain stability to name a few of the characteristics of a student who has a positive trajectory through this vector (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Developing Purpose

“Developing purpose entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans, and to persist despite obstacles” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 209). A student who is developing purpose is one who is looking for vocational options and making informed decisions, and is engaging in activities that they find interesting and rewarding. This stage of development is also important for the development of interpersonal and family relationships. In this vector, a student begins to make vocational decisions, lifestyle choices, and pursue personal interests (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Developing Integrity

The seven vectors Chickering and Reisser describe as the pathway for student development ends with the development of integrity (1993). In this vector, students begin to synthesize everything they have learned about themselves and the world in which they live. The focus shifts from firm belief in right and wrong to an understanding of human error. While navigating this vector, students are humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. The humanizing of values for

college students refers to the restructuring and/or development of values previously set in place. An important notion to remember for students who are moving through this vector is that “Integrity requires the ability to detach, to withhold judgment, while staying in touch with persistent feelings...” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 243).

This student development theory is particularly useful in framing this study because of the use of vectors as opposed to stages. This theory recognizes that students are extremely diverse and complex. The use of vectors as opposed to hard stage models allows for the thought that at any given point in a students’ development, they are moving through more than one vector at a time. This is important because it recognizes that students can develop more than one competency at a time.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) provided a model that allowed for the holistic development of students, and what that process may look like. Measurement of where a student may lie within each vector may difficult to pinpoint. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated:

We cannot easily discern what subtle mix of people, books, settings, or events promotes growth. Nor can we easily name changes in ways of thinking, feeling, or interpreting the world. But we can observe behavior and record words, both of which can reveal shifts from hunch to analysis, from simple to complex perceptions, from divisive bias to compassionate understanding. Theory can give us the lenses to see these changes and help them along (Chickering & Reisser 1993, p. 43).

Measuring or understanding where a student may fall in each vector may be difficult, however, as a student moves through their college career and become involved in their studies and organizations they should gain competence in at least one of the seven vectors (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Student Leadership Development

Chickering and Reisser (1993) provided great insight on the development of college students with their seven vectors of student development. However, over the past two decades the increased interest in the development of leadership skills in students has led to a number of studies centered on college students and their development of leadership competencies (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives, Dugan, & Owen 2011; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon 1998).

Dugan and Komives (2007), described four trends that are currently assisting college students in their quest for leadership development: the expansion of curricular and co-curricular leadership programs, focused theoretical and conceptual leadership models, professionalization in leadership education, and leadership research. The expansion of curricular and co-curricular leadership programs includes, but is not limited to, the development of the academic study of leadership through majors and minors, as well as formal leadership training for those students who hold leadership roles in student-led organizations. The focused theoretical and conceptual leadership models that have been developed to address the needs of college students and their development process, like the Social Change Model of Leadership or the Leadership Identity Model, help students transition leadership from theory to practice. As student leadership development has become a more prevalent learning outcome, the need for professionalization in leadership education has also increased. Colleges and universities have addressed this need by ensuring that there are trained personnel available to support and work directly with the students in these leadership programs. The fourth

trend identified by Dugan and Komives (2007) was the importance of continued leadership research.

Along with the four trends mentioned, Dugan and Komives (2007) also identified 12 leadership outcomes in their multi-institutional study: leadership outcomes, change over time, pre-college experience matters, leadership shows moderate gender differences, racial and ethnic groups differ, openness to *change* is greater for marginalized groups of students, discussions about socio-cultural issues matter a great deal, mentoring matters, campus involvement matters, service matters, positional leadership roles develop leadership, and formal leadership programs matter. These leadership outcomes show that keeping students engaged with one another and connected to campus activities is one way to ensure that leadership development is taking place. The importance of student relationships, formal mentoring, and leadership programs is also exemplified. “Positional leadership roles were strong, positive predictors of *Leadership Efficacy* for both men and women...” (Dugan & Komives 2007, p. 16). This study demonstrates the importance that engaging in activities that encourage personal growth and leadership development, such as serving as a peer mentor within a peer-mentoring program, provide students with an opportunity to gain from the leadership of others as well as develop their own styles of leadership.

“Understanding the process of creating a leadership identity is central to developing leadership programs and teaching leadership” (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen 2005, p. 594). As undergraduate students develop as individuals, they begin to develop a leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005) that is

formed by the experiences of each individual student. While Dugan and Komives (2007) described trends in developing leadership capacity and specific leadership outcomes, Komives et al. (2005) provide insight as to how students develop their identity within the frame of leadership. What emerged was the Leadership Identity Development model, where six stages of leadership identity development with five categories within each stage were identified as helping students develop their leadership identities. The six stages of leadership identity development are: (1) Awareness, (2) Exploration/Engagement, (3) Leader Identified, (4) Leadership Differentiated, (5) Generativity, and (6) Integration/Synthesis (Komives et al. 2005, p. 599). At the lowest level of development or stage one, leadership is tied to position and power, the leader is seen as someone else. Komives et al. proposed that by stage six, or the highest level of development, leadership is seen as a collaborative process where individuals are not focused on the development of leadership in others (2005). Students move from one stage to another, they move through transitions to mark the completion of one stage and the entering into another (Komives et al., 2005). Below are the five categories or factors that take place within each of the six stages:

1. Developmental influences
2. Developing self
3. Group influences
4. Students' changing view of self with others
5. Students' broadening view of leadership

The first category, developmental influences, begins at an early age, with adults being the primary influence in developing youth. Adults serve as prominent role models for the students and help provide guidance and affirmation regarding one's actions and behaviors. As students begin to develop and interact with their peers in ways that support mature interpersonal relationships, the influence of lessons taught by adults and peers begins to have more influence on a student's leadership identity. From engaging with peers, depth and meaning of leadership are developed (Komives et al., 2005). Meaningful involvement and reflective learning also emerged as themes in developmental influences in this category. These experiences allow students to gain experience and synthesize the meanings of their experiences in order to further develop their identity as a leader. The third category, or group influences, is somewhat contingent on category two (developing self) because as students develop their personal identity they begin to seek involvement in groups/organizations that closely align with their identity (Komives et al., 2005). The fifth category in developing a leadership identity is a broadening view of leadership. In this stage the leadership identity is formed by what a student has learned about his/her self and their views of leadership (Komives et al., 2005). Students in this stage have moved from a leader-focused point of view toward a belief that leadership is a shared responsibility and process in which one collaborates with peers. Peer mentors have many opportunities to develop their leadership identity.

Posner noted, "Leadership development is now an integral part of the educational program of college students" (2012), and acknowledges the fact that the

need for leadership development is being addressed in the case of undergraduate students. What he sees to be the next step is to examine how to measure the effectiveness of these collegiate leadership opportunities.

Measuring Student Leadership Development

Student leadership behaviors can be measured by examining the frequency of leadership behaviors being used. Kouzes and Posner's (2013) Student Leadership Practices Inventory [SLPI] is "a leadership development tool" that enables students to identify those leadership practices they most often use. The SLPI provides a measure of how frequently students use the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model, which categorizes leadership behaviors into five practices used by individuals when they feel they are most effective as leaders. The five practices identified by Kouzes and Posner (2014) in their book *The Student Leadership Challenge* are: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. These five practices are "the core leadership competencies that emerged from analyzing thousands of personal-best leadership cases" (p. 15-16). These five practices have been researched using college students as well as other individuals. Posner goes on to say, "the more student leaders reported having both opportunities to be leaders and to develop their leadership skills the more they engaged in each of the five leadership practices" (p. 232).

In Gallagher, Jeffrey, Pories, and Daughety (2014), 1,103 undergraduate students completed the SLPI. In this study, leadership behaviors were measured by the SLPI to quantify the frequency of a practice utilized by an undergraduate. Gallagher et

al. stated that “individuals with no organizational leadership experience had significantly lower scores than those with at least one type of organizational leadership experience...” (2014, p. 50). Furthermore, Gallagher et al found that “students with three or more different types of organizational leadership experience scored significantly higher on all SLPI practice indicators than those with only one or two experiences, again with the exception of Enabling Others to Act” (2014, p. 50). This indicated that students involved in at least one experience with organizational leadership will more frequently use the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). Therefore, the more experiences an undergraduate student has with organizational leadership, the higher their score on the SLPI will be. This implies that the more opportunities undergraduates have to practice their leadership, the more likely they are to exhibit aspects of Kouzes and Posner’s (2014) exemplary leadership practices.

Leadership Development Through Peer Mentoring

There is little literature on the effects of peer mentoring on college students’ leadership development. Colvin and Ashman’s (2010) study on peer mentoring relationships in higher education provided an in-depth look at the benefits and risks of peer mentoring relationships in undergraduate students. “In general, both peer mentors and students saw benefits, ranging from individual gains to helping students become connected to the campus as a whole” (Colvin & Ashman, 2010, p. 131). Becoming a FOCUS mentor means that the undergraduate is accepting responsibility and making a

commitment to their mentees. Mentors strive to build connections, and educate on resources. In return the mentor is encouraged to build their own knowledge about the campus and is given the opportunity to practice leadership skills. Though it seems likely that the FOCUS peer mentors are developing their leadership ability through the experience, assessment of this experience is needed to examine this phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational leadership helped in framing this study due the nature of the leaders that participated. Transformational leaders are those who are charismatic, practice individualized consideration, and provide intellectual stimulation. This form of leadership depends highly on interactions between leaders and subordinates, the use of goal setting, and motivation (Hater & Bass, 1988; Strong, Wynn, Irby, & Linder, 2013; Tourish, 2008; Yammarino & Bass, 1990). FOCUS mentors, through the use of the 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner 2014), are able to use transformative leadership as they develop their competencies and work toward meeting the needs of mentees.

Northouse (2013) defines transformational leadership as a process “whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (p. 186). Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices for Becoming an Exemplary Leader (2014), provides a model of transformational leadership that “recommends what people need to do in order to become effective leaders” (Northouse, 2013, p. 199). Leaders who use these five practices as a guide for effective leadership: take time to learn about their followers, set

personal examples, help others reach goals, take calculated risks for the betterment of the group, recognize the accomplishments of others, create environments in which others feel welcomed, and much more (Northouse, 2013).

Kouzes and Posner talked with “thousands of young men and women, representing many educational institutions and youth organizations from many different places around the world” (2014, p. XIII). After analyzing Personal-Best Leadership Experiences (“experiences that they believe are their individual standards of excellence”) Kouzes and Posner found that Personal-Best Leadership Experiences were common and leaders demonstrated similar behaviors in their reflections (2014, p. 9). These behaviors became known as The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. These five practices have been defined as: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the heart. The following list identifies the Five Practices and the commitments that accompany each practice. There are two commitments per practice. These commitments (Kouzes and Posner 2014, p. 15) serve as a guide to understanding the Five Practices and how ordinary people can put them to use in everyday encounters.

Model the Way

1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

Inspire a Shared Vision

3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

Challenge the Process

5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

Enable Others to Act

7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
8. Strengthening others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.

Encourage the Heart

9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) was used as the theoretical framework upon which this study was built. This model is used to highlight the importance that experience has on the learning process (Evans et al., 2009). FOCUS mentors transition through each of the four stages (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) as they develop their mentor competencies.

Kolb's Model (1984) explains what mentors are experiencing during certain aspects of their roles. Evans et al. (2009) described concrete experience as being fully involved in the learning experience. In this stage mentors are relying on their personal experiences and formal education to facilitate lessons and assist mentees. Each week

mentors were asked to complete a weekly synopsis form that provided a summary of the weekly seminar and critical feedback for peers, which would be considered reflective observation, or the second stage of Kolb's Model. The mentor synopsis form allows mentors to reflect and share thoughts about the material being covered and the delivery strategy being used. Each week during the mentor and coordinator meeting, the stage of abstract conceptualization is used as mentors integrate feedback and ideas from the previous week (Evans et al., 2009). The fourth and final stage in Kolb's Model is active experimentation. Mentors learn by active experimentation during FOCUS trainings and while actually facilitating the weekly seminar that their mentees attend. Figure 1 shows what a FOCUS Mentor is engaging in at each stage of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984).

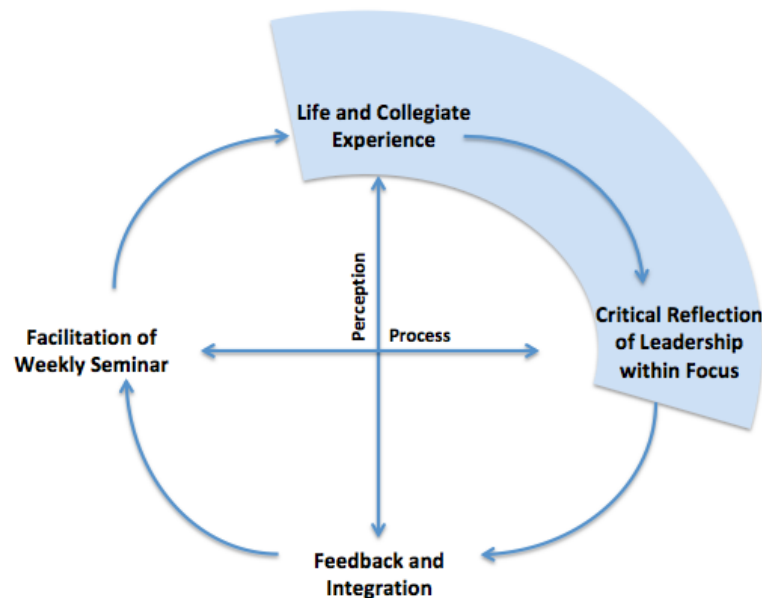


Figure 1: Adaptation on Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and its application to FOCUS Learning Community, and the emphasis that it places on Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation

CHAPTER III

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population of this study was college students serving as mentors to college peers. The sample used was students who were participating as FOCUS mentors for Regents' Scholars at Texas A&M University in the Fall 2015 semester. In the Fall of 2015, FOCUS collected data pertaining to the demographics of their incoming freshmen. From the data collected by FOCUS: 135 incoming freshmen self-reported as Hispanic, 39 as White, 24 as Asian, 1 Native American, and 6 as Other (McIntosh, 2015). The majority of undergraduate students who apply to serve as mentors are freshmen that have successfully completed their freshmen year with the FOCUS Learning Community. The FOCUS mentors reflect the demographics of the participant demographics. There were 47 peer mentors who had the potential to be included in this study. Of those 47 peer mentors, 34 actually participated (18 First-Year Mentors and 16 Returning Mentors). All peer mentors in attendance at the October 2015 FOCUS Mentor Training were asked to participate. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), this study constitutes a purposive sample, based on the fact that the participants in this study were chosen specifically due to their involvement as FOCUS mentors. Utilizing these students provided appropriate insight into the effects of involvement as a FOCUS mentor on the leadership development of these students.

Access to this sample was gained by the researcher having served the FOCUS Learning Community as a paid Graduate Assistant for one-and-a-half years. During this

time, the researcher was actively engaged in the daily dealings of the learning community. Having supervised four groups of four mentors as they navigated the duties and tasks of their mentorship, the researcher noticed the growth and development of these undergraduate mentors, and proceeded to obtain permission from the learning community's director to include these students in this study.

Methodology and Instrumentation

The design of this study is qualitative content analysis. This type of qualitative study focuses on indirect human behavior by analyzing communication (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Huyn, 2012). Content analysis refers to analyzing communications and searching for emerging themes and seeking to understand the significance of reoccurring phrases or other commonalties (Bryman, 2012). For this study, undergraduate students who had been selected as mentors for the FOCUS Learning Community were asked to complete the SLPI prior to a monthly mentor training that serves as an opportunity for formal leadership education or professional development for all FOCUS mentors. The mentors were asked to complete a Personal-Best Leadership Experience reflection (Kouzes & Posner, 2013), and asked to answer reflection questions regarding their SLPI scores. After the completion of the Personal-Best Leadership Experience there was a follow up question to gauge how the mentors perceived their leadership as a FOCUS mentor.

Data Collection

The Personal-Best Leadership Experience and reflection questions were completed in the lecture hall where each monthly mentor training took place. This

allowed for timely collection of data with little to no disruption to the routine of FOCUS or its mentors. In order to ensure anonymity, the names of participants were deleted after collection and coded using a numerical and categorical system. Returning mentors were labeled RM followed by a number between 1 and 16. First-year mentors were coded FYM followed by a number between 1 and 18.

The personal-best leadership experiences and the answers to the question of “How has your experience as a FOCUS mentor impacted or helped your development of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership?” was the data for this study. Though students completed the SLPI as part of the study, the scores were not statistically analyzed and used as data in this study. Instead, the mentors were asked to use their SLPI scores as part of the reflection process. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each reflection was analyzed for evidence of each of the 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). When a particular phrase or section of a reflection was determined to fall under a particular practice, it was coded as that practice. The researcher did not create categories when coding data, rather inductive reasoning was used to synthesize and code data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is approached from a different perspective than quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). While the end goal of this study is not to present a product that can be replicated by following a set of directives that will yield the same results, the goal is to provide a look into the phenomenon of leadership

development in undergraduate students in a peer mentoring role. To establish this trustworthiness Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used in the process data collection and analysis.

Credibility in qualitative research answers the question how do the findings from the study line up with what is actually taking place (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative research does not take place in a vacuum, and is constantly changing and evolving. In order to capture and present a holistic view of what the researcher has observed, prolonged engagement was used to assist the creation of credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher served the FOCUS Learning Community for one-and-a-half years as Graduate Assistant and worked closely with FOCUS mentors and staff on a daily basis. As a graduate assistant, the researcher worked one-on-one with mentors, assisted in development and implementation of training sessions, and was involved in the daily functions of the FOCUS Learning Community. In an attempt to overcome any bias brought on by the researcher's prolonged engagement, the researcher did not conduct research within their FOCUS office or during FOCUS office hours. This allowed the researcher to separate work responsibilities from research findings. The researcher also ensured that all names were removed from reflections before transcription and coding took place. This was done to further ensure the anonymity of the participants and decrease the charge of bias on the part of the researcher. Through this process the researcher is familiar with program norms and able to present results that are representative and congruent with their experiences with the learning community. Peer debriefing with faculty and peers not involved in this study (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985) was used by the researcher to enhance the credibility of this study. Peers were asked to review samples of raw data to ensure that the researcher's thought process was at a place where data and categories were representative of the raw data.

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, generalizability is not a goal of this study. However, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of transferability is a desired outcome for this study. In the notion of transferability, the decision on how relevant the findings of a study are lie with the reader. It is the job of the researcher to provide a clear idea of the setting, background, and richly described data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For transferability, in the case of this study, the researcher has provided extensive background knowledge on the learning community and the student population that it services as well as describing the researcher's access and relationship to the population. Dependability and confirmability were established through the use of an audit trail, researcher-kept reflexive journals, and a peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexive journals were kept by the researcher to organize thoughts and categorize responses and to make note of any emerging themes/contexts. Journaling was organized and color coded for easy reference to the data. Reflexive journaling in this study was particularly helpful in categorizing and tracking the thought process of the researcher, allowing for a clear audit trail. Peer debriefing took place in two forms: with academic peers and with FOCUS staff. Academic peers served as a system to ensure that data was coded in a way conducive to the study and correctly categorized. FOCUS staff served as a way to ensure that the data was not taken out of context. Both FOCUS staff and academic peers were valuable sources when the researcher was seeking current

articles or other information. Data is coded FYM 1—FYM18 for First-Year Mentors, and RM 1—RM 16 for Returning Mentors (denoting that the mentor has served more than one year as a FOCUS Mentor). Data was coded before the analysis began to ensure the confidentiality of the students; these data codes are included in the quotations to produce an audit trail.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS/RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore how FOCUS Mentors perceive their development of leadership through their mentoring experience by evaluating reflections of both their Personal-Best Leadership Experience, and their responses to questions pertaining to their experiences as mentors. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do FOCUS mentors describe their Personal-Best Leadership Experience?
2. How do FOCUS mentors perceive the impact of being a FOCUS peer mentor on the development of their leadership behaviors?

How Do FOCUS Mentors Describe Their Personal-Best Leadership Experience?

Each mentor that participated in this study was asked to complete a Personal-Best Leadership Experience essay. Mentors were asked to keep this experience relative to being a FOCUS Mentor. There were two contexts in which mentors described their Personal-Best Leadership Experience taking place: Inside the In-FOCUS Session and outside of the In-FOCUS Session. When mentors described their Personal-Best Leadership experience in the context of the IFS, there were several scenarios that they may be describing. These scenarios include but are not limited to: gaining confidence in themselves, their ability to speak in public, leading a group discussion, answering difficult questions, or creatively engaging freshmen and fellow mentors in the classroom setting. Mentors who had described their Personal-Best Leadership as having taken

place outside of the context described what took place in a small group or one-on-one setting, usually assisting a freshmen with a personal or academic issue.

Inside the Context of IFS

Mentors who reported their Personal-Best Leadership Experience as having taken place within the context of the weekly seminar IFS (FYM 1, FYM 4, FYM 7, FYM 9, FYM 10, FYM 14, FYM 17, FYM 18, RM 4, RM 12), reported having gained skills on a personal level. These mentors discussed having developed: confidence, organizational skills, and learning how to build effective relationships with mentees.

FYM 9 stated, “The only leadership experience that I have had in FOCUS is being the leader for an IFS... The calming feeling I had while running the IFS increased my confidence in my leadership goals” (FYM 9). FYM 10 reflected on a time when they “took initiative” (FYM 10) within their team of mentors to create a well-organized and open environment for all mentors involved and reorganized a lesson plan to fit the needs of their students in order to increase engagement in the IFS. “...our mentees enjoyed the IFS, and the entire class went 10X more smooth” (FYM 10). FYM 17 mentions a student approaching them after an IFS session and expressing how homesick they were. FYM 17 was able to draw on past experiences to foster a relationship with a college freshmen seeking peer guidance.

Of the two returning mentors who reflected that their Personal-Best Leadership Experience took place within the context of their IFS; one reflected on improvement and the other on an earlier mentor moment. “Last year my confidence and ability to facilitate and debrief wasn’t the best. This year as a returner I wanted to demonstrate, and prove

myself in the classroom, my growth and learning” (RM 4). RM 4 is reflecting on growth and improvement, and is using reflection to explain how participating as a FOCUS Mentor has helped them to develop as an undergraduate student. RM 12 reflects on their second week as a First-Year Mentor, and how they were able to set an example for the rest of their team. “I get others to go above expectations by going above expectations—so if I expect them to excel I should as well. After all, we’re a team” (RM 12).

Outside the Context of IFS

Mentor/Mentee relationships for FOCUS Learning Community students go far beyond what is being taught during a one-hour weekly seminar. For many mentees, their mentor is a person that they can look up to, bond with, and confide in. The following mentors reflect their Personal-Best Leadership Experience as having taking place outside of the context of an IFS session: FYM2, FYM 3, FYM 5, FYM 8, FYM 11, FYM 12, FYM 13, FYM 15, FYM 16, RM 1—RM 3, RM 6—RM 11, RM 13—RM 15.

First-Year Mentors in this context describe assisting freshmen with acclimating to college life, assisting with knowledge of the Texas A&M University campus culture and procedures, connecting their mentee to resources, and encouraging student engagement. FYM 2 reflected on a time when she assisted a mentee who needed to drop a class. This mentor says “that moment really [made] me feel impactful because my mentee came to me for guidance and advice...” (FYM 2). The relationship between FYM 2 and this particular mentee focused on sharing knowledge and taking FYM 2’s ability to accept responsibility for the information that they were sharing. FYM 3 and FYM 5 wrote of helping freshmen acclimate to the college setting.

“One of my mentees was not sure if she wanted to continue going to Texas A&M University I [guided] her to the best choice that would benefit her... I was happy and proud that she chose me and trusted me to help her. I gave her my experience as a first-generation college student, and told her that it’s hard but worth it. I told her that I would be there for her if she needed any help” (FYM 3).

FYM 3 was able assist a freshmen who was considering leaving Texas A&M University through personal experience. This mentor, with the help of FOCUS trainings and the willingness to assist someone in a similar situation that they had been in personally, was able to aid in the decision-making process without inserting themselves into the problem. They use the term “guide” (FYM 3), because they have been taught through extensive trainings that their job as a mentor is to guide and decide.

FYM 5 wrote about helping mentees feel welcomed at the annual FOCUS Workshop. This is a full-day workshop that allows freshmen to get to know each other and their mentors. FYM 5 took that opportunity to lay the foundation for trust and positive relationships with their mentees. They later quote their mentees as saying “...they enjoyed having IFS with [their mentor team] and that they would not have liked A&M as much [without] it because it helped them make friends and united them during the first week when they were most confused” (FYM 5).

Other First-Year Mentors discussed having assisted their mentees by tutoring them in classes, sharing with them knowledge of different academic procedures, encouraging engagement with other students both inside and outside of FOCUS, and

providing one-on-one emotional support (FYM 8, FYM 11—FYM 13, FYM 15, FYM 16).

Rather than focusing more on general freshmen acclimation and comfort, Returning Mentors who identified their Personal-Best Leadership Experience as having taken outside of the IFS reflected more on personal growth and leadership. These mentors reflected that they felt they were at their best as FOCUS Mentors when they were: setting an example, participating in decision making, setting and reaching goals, fostering relationships, developing leadership skills, and encouraging teambuilding. These mentors appear to be using past mentor/mentee experiences as a foundation for what they now consider their Personal-Best Leadership Experience. RM 11 reflected wanting to become a mentor to improve the experience of freshmen in situations similar to their own because they felt that their FOCUS Mentor had not lived up to their expectations. “I decided to become a mentor after my own mentor failed to be what I expected and I wanted to be a good guide for someone going through the same things I went through my freshman year” (RM 11).

Returning Mentors 1 and 10 identified their Personal-Best Leadership Experience as being the influences that encouraged their mentees to apply to become FOCUS Mentors. They also both discuss not having seen the impact that their mentorship was having on their mentees until the mentees decided to apply to become mentors themselves. The advice RM 1 would give to another mentor would be “to always be a model because your [students] are watching” (RM 1). RM 1 also states that, “my mentees told me that they were applying to be a mentor because they had seen how

much impact that I had on their first-year experience and they wanted to have the same impact on another freshmen's life." RM 10 tells us that "I never felt as if I had led them through much but in their eyes I had been an example of what and how to do things" (RM 10).

Mentors, both returning and first-year, had numerous opportunities to be the best mentors that they could be. These undergraduate students used critical reflection to describe a time when they were at their personal best as FOCUS Mentors. The two contexts that we have discussed (Within the IFS and Outside of the IFS) are the two contexts that mentors expressed that their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences took place within.

Analysis of Personal-Best Leadership Experiences

For this study, I did not look at the impact of the context in which the experience took place, but how the mentor described the experiences and why they perceived that particular moment as their personal best as FOCUS mentors. This section is divided into five sections, Enable Others to Act, Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, and Encourage the Heart. Personal-Best Leadership Experience was read and analyzed for evidence of the 5 Practices. In order to categorize these reflections the 10 Commitments of Exemplary Leaders were used to gauge which of the 5 practices was in use.

Enable Others to Act

In this practice, leaders create trustworthy and collaborative teams. They work to build mutual respect amongst the team in the hopes of continuing the efforts of the group. The commitments for this practice are:

1. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
2. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

The mentors whose Personal-Best Leadership Experiences fell within the two commandments for enabling others to act referenced situations where collaboration and teamwork needed to be improved upon, or assisting a freshmen or group of freshmen in feeling welcomed and included in campus culture of Texas A&M University and the FOCUS Learning community. Many of these reflected upon a time when they found ways to boost their own confidence or the confidence of someone else by helping to increase competence and creating a sense of accomplishment.

FYM 1 describes enabling others to act within the context of an In-FOCUS Session and encouraging mentee participation through encouragement and acceptance. “The way I got others to go beyond the level of performance was by having the most quiet mentees take the jobs that the extroverted ones would normally take” (FYM 1). RM 8 reflected on a time that they worked to build confidence in their mentees by having the mentees participate in the check-in process during The Big Event (an all-day, student-lead community service project). This allowed mentees to feel a sense of

ownership in their volunteer process as well as giving them the chance to see a new process through for themselves. “They were really amazing as they all took the initiative to do the things I was supposed to do as a leader while I was not there” (RM 8).

RM 12 told us how they go about engaging others and encouraging them to become an active part of the situations mentees may find themselves in. “To engage others, I engage with them and try to create a welcoming environment” (RM 12). RM 13 also described how they encourage mentees to become engaged: “I would ask questions that built on top of one another and got the students to start teaching themselves” (RM 13). These mentors enabled their mentees to take their learning process into their own hands and helped them gain the confidence in their own abilities.

FYM 2 and FYM 3 describe their Personal-Best Leadership Experience as a time they assisted mentees who were struggling in their first year of college. These mentors took time to first get to know these mentees on a personal level and then assisted the mentees in finding the appropriate avenues for addressing the issues. FYM 2 assisted a mentee who was considering dropping a course. FYM ensured that the mentee know the correct people to talk to and what that process would be like. FYM 3 enabled their mentee through motivation when one of her mentees was not sure if they wanted to continue their education at Texas A&M University.

FYM 13 and 15 provide a look at the limitations of mentoring in the FOUCS Learning Community. FYM 13 stated that their leadership practice has been by “guiding my mentees through t any hardships they are going through” (FYM 13). FYM 13 discusses working with their mentees through situations ranging from academic to

personal, and from short-term solutions to further planning. As a mentor, FYM 13 demonstrates the understanding that a mentor is there for assistance and is not a decision engine. FYM 15, while reflecting on a shared that “As a mentor I can’t give out advice” (FYM 15). FYM 13 and FYM 15 are enabling mentees to take action by sharing with them information and options, but not providing the answers or solutions that mentees should be learning to find for themselves.

Model the Way

In this practice, leaders must first find what values they hold and how those values effect their decisions. After this, in order to fully understand this practice in leadership, they need to understand what the values of those around them are and what values both leader and follower share. The commitments below are how leaders can work toward understanding of how to model the way for those they are working with.

1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

When it comes to being role models and setting examples, FOCUS Mentors have a plethora of experience. These undergraduate students lead large group activities, facilitate small group discussion, and act as examples of experienced college students. Many have also previously participated in FOCUS as freshmen and have seen mentors in action. These mentors strive to set positive examples for not only their mentees but for the freshmen of the FOCUS Learning Community as a whole.

These mentors have been through many of the same situations as, or in situations similar enough, that they are able to relate to their mentees. FYM 3 was able to use their experiences as a first-generation college student to help their mentee see that as a first-generation college student, they were not alone. FYM 3 shared their experience and offered to give the mentee any assistance they may need help to find a resource or need someone to listen. FYM 3 and this particular mentee discussed the difficulty of college and the worth of sticking it out. FYM 12 also shared their experience with mentees from early in the academic year. “At first, the girls were shy and scared to share, so I tried to be extra outgoing and told a few embarrassing stories about my first week of college to make them at ease and comfortable” (FYM 12). This mentor shared values and encouraged her mentees to begin to open up, by being the first to share and attempt to build connections within their group. RM 15 shared that “Passion and love for what [you’re] doing are key to moving people to get the job done” (RM 15). While this is a slightly different take from FYM 3 and FYM 12 who reflected sharing personal experiences to model the way, RM 15 stated that a mentor must “be clear and direct with the things you want to get done” (RM 15).

Mentors also discussed having modeled the way for mentees when mentors were unaware of what an impact they were having. RM 10 reflected that their Personal-Best Leadership Experience revolved around two of their mentees from the previous year deciding to apply to become FOCUS mentors, stating that “you inspire/lead without actually knowing it” (RM10). RM 1 also reflected on a mentee deciding to apply to serve as a FOCUS mentor because the mentee had “seen how much impact that [their

mentor] had on their first-year experience and they wanted to have the same impact on another freshmen's life" (RM 1).

Mentors have the ability to model the way in FOCUS in more ways than being good role models for freshmen. FOCUS mentors work closely with full-time staff to ensure that the FOCUS freshmen are receiving the assistance and attention that is needed. FOCUS mentors have the opportunity to lead team meetings and are encouraged to speak openly with their supervisors. RM 5 reflected on how their willingness to model the way during their weekly mentor meetings made a very large impact on the productivity of their meetings: "Honestly, after setting an example I felt like the meetings now have better flow & mentor/coordinator is more prepared" (RM 5). RM 5 goes on to explain the actions they took in order to make this difference and model the way. "My actions included being there on time, having IFS prep ready a day before the meeting, having the activities pulled out in my laptop before the meeting & duo having questions for facilitation" (RM 5).

FOCUS mentors strive to set appropriate examples for their mentees and clarify values (those of the organization and the university). They take this task seriously and is a practice that 16 of the 34 respondents were coded as having used.

Inspire a Shared Vision:

In order for an organization to continue to move forward, there needs to be a destination in mind, and there need to be people who see the value in working toward this future. When leaders inspire a shared vision, they are sharing a vision of what the

future of the organization/group could look like and expressing how members can help with and benefit from assisting in the creation of this future.

1. Envision the future imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
2. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

While mentors are working with such a wide variety of students, each with their own goals, creating a shared vision may seem daunting. RM 7 provided advice on how they tackled the task of inspiring a shared vision. They advise that you not get discouraged with those who may not be as motivated as you, that each person is different. Mentors who have been identified as having used the practice of inspire a shared vision reflected: providing encouragement (RM 16, FYM 4, FYM 17, and FYM 18), reminding others of a common goal (RM 2, RM 7, RM 11, FYM 7, FYM 10, and FYM 12), motivation (FYM 9 and FYM 11), and when reflecting up the transition from mentee to mentor (RM 10 and RM 11).

Encouragement is something that all students could use as they transition to university life. Having mentors provides mentees with a source of encouragement outside of their family and friend structures. FYM 17 assisted a mentee that was unsure of their current major and was seeking advice on how to change it. FYM 17 took the time to speak with the mentee and says: “We wrote out a list together of steps we should take” (FYM 17). FYM 17 assisted their mentee in a time of uncertainty by lettering the mentee describe what it is they wanted and allowing FYM 17 to explain the process of working toward the desired outcome. Other times, it is not the mentees that are the only

ones in need of a shared vision. In order for an IFS session to operate smoothly, mentors must effectively communicate within their team and with their FOCUS coordinator. RM 16 addresses this when they reflected upon a time they encouraged open communication in their team in the context of a planning session for an IFS. “I asked all the members to speak freely on certain issues that were affecting the unity and productivity of the group” (RM 16). This allowed all mentors and coordinators involved to share their vision for the IFS. FYM 9 also addressed inspiring a shared vision within their mentor team: “In order to keep the other mentors from losing interest I made sure to ask for their input in order to be sure that they felt they were being lead and not being ordered to do anything” (FYM 9). FYM 9 discusses keeping mentors engaged during an In-FOCUS Session, and the importance of asking for input from team mates in order to keep all teammates engaged, and working toward the same goal. RM 11 also discusses the importance of collaboration in terms of inspiring a shared vision; “A good leader not only helps other by guiding, they also learn from those around them” (RM 11).

Part of inspiring a shared vision is reminding others of the common goals. RM 7 says that their advice is to know that “you can only motivate people so much, but if you are going for a common goal...gathering people and making things happen will pay itself” (RM 7). In regard to keeping common goals in mind, RM 11 shared that they applied to become a mentor because their mentor did not meet expectations, RM 11 wanted to do what they could to ensure that other freshmen had a reliable mentor. RM 11 inspired a shared vision by helping their mentees remember their goals and what they hoped to achieve in college.

Inspiring a shared vision can be difficult, especially when the goal is continued buy-in and action. Mentors take pride in the work that they do, and feel that they have inspired mentees when their mentees apply to become mentors. RM 10 wrote that they had not realized the impact they had had on their mentees. After spending a semester with their mentees, RM 10 wrote that the mentees said that "...they owned FOCUS a lot and the mentors as well" (RM 10). RM 10 shows that FOCUS mentors have more pull with their mentees than they may realize. Mentors have the power to inspire others to carry on what previous FOCUS mentors have begun.

Challenge the Process

Challenging the process is where growth in an organization takes place. This practice allows for innovation and creativity. In this practice, leaders are looking to help others exceed expectations and take risks. Challenging the process requires the leader to:

1. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
2. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

FOCUS mentors are given a great deal of responsibility and a certain degree of freedom with their mentorship. They are able to decide how they can best serve their mentees, they are able to adapt lesson plans to accommodate the freshmen in seminars they lead, and are encouraged to reach beyond their own comfort zones to help others

grow. Being a mentor at times is about challenging what has been done in the past to create a better processes for the learning community.

Mentors that were identified as having used this practice in their Personal-Best Leadership Experience discussed mainly times that they changed a process within the FOCUS Learning Community. For example, when FYM 4 decided that the way an activity was to be presented in an IFS would not benefit their students in the way it was intended to, they changed the activity completely. FYM 4 was able to change the activity and conduct the IFS in a way that they saw fit for where their students were at. In doing this FYM 4 says that students were able to engage and participate in a level that RM 4 had not seen with that group of freshmen. FYM 18 also reflected on a time that they saw room for improvement in a FOCUS IFS lesson. They also took the initiative to adapt an activity to better suit the needs of their freshmen. FYM 18 says that through that experience they learned, “how important outlook can be on situations... We came in the IFS with the goal of making it fun and worthwhile. We accomplished this goal” (FYM 18). RM 4 provides a slightly different take on adapting an IFS lesson, and reflects on a time that they were able to challenge the process in a very discrete way. As a returning mentor, they had the opportunity to assist a first-year mentor developing their debriefing skills while ensuring the freshmen were understanding what was being asked of them. RM 4 reflected on their personal development as a mentor and how they were seeking ways to help others. “I took the initiative in helping paraphrase the questions being asked, but stepped back when I saw the mentor getting the hang of it” (RM 4). RM 4 saw a fellow mentor struggling to facilitate part of the lesson, and found

a way to assist that would not be seen as interfering with a teammate's role for that lesson.

There are times when subtle changes to a lesson plan may not bring about the change that a mentor is looking for in the IFS structure, sometimes the change must begin within the mentor team itself and that is what FYM 10 was referring to when they stated "I made a decision to change the status quo of how our IFS normally worked and took a risk [with] how everything would be set up" (FYM 10). According to FYM 10, the process that needed to be changed was how the mentors worked as a team. RM 9 took a look inside themselves to find room for improvement and reflected upon their first year as a FOCUS mentor and how they plan to "find a better approach on how to build relationships with [mentees]" (RM 9). Constructive feedback is a valuable learning tool. FOCUS mentors are constantly seeking feedback and look for innovative ways to engage with their mentees. RM 5 reported having provided feedback to new mentors when they saw room for improvement or wanted to let the new mentor that they were doing a good job.

Encourage the Heart

In this practice leaders are seeking ways to encourage their teammates and recognize their accomplishments. Leaders take time to celebrate when a goal is reached and recognize individuals' contributions to reaching the goal. In this practice leaders are following these commitments:

1. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
2. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p.15)

While only six of the participants described encouraging the heart in their reflections, three did provide great insight as to how they encouraged their mentees. Common occurrences in reflections were letting mentees know they were not in their situations alone, encouragement, and/or affirmation of a job well done. These actions are positive reinforcement for freshmen and fellow mentors alike.

FYM 8 reflected on a time where they encouraged a mentee encountering academic struggles: "...I let him know that even though he's hit some bumps in the road, that failures are just learning experiences" (FYM 8). FYM 12 reflected that they were "able to facilitate discussions about their fears, excitements, and first weeks while sharing good advice" (FYM 12). These mentors were able to show their mentees that they were not alone. The sharing of experiences and feelings assists in creating an environment in which all involved may feel comfortable encouraging their peers.

When mentors consider encouragement, some also remember that recognizing a job well done can be just as effective as public praise. FYM 17 reflects on the value in recognizing a job well done. "...and encouraging/affirming a job well done" (FYM 17). FYM 17 goes on to state "Experience is a great teacher, patience and understanding go a long way, and encouragement increases likelihood of success" (FYM 17).

RM 5 spoke of providing constructive feedback in areas that need improvement but also briefly discussed the importance of acknowledging when things are going well. RM 15 reflected, "When you get people moving and assigning them tasks they may come up with new ideas, encourage those ideas and you start seeing wonderful results"

(RM 15). While encourage the heart may not be the most widely discussed practice, it appears to have a significant impact on the mentors and mentees who are receiving the encouragement.

How Do FOCUS Mentors Perceive the Impact of Being a FOCUS Peer Mentor on the Development of Their Leadership Behaviors?

The prompt used to engage mentors in reflecting on their highest practice was: Look at your highest score on the 5 Practices. What is the practice? How has your experience as a FOCUS peer mentor encouraged or helped you develop this practice? In response to this question, at least one mentor from each mentor classification (FYM and RM) reported scoring highest on at least one of the 5 Practices: Enable Others to Act, Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, and Encourage the Heart.

Enable Others to Act

1. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
2. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

15 of the Mentors who reported scoring highest on the practice Enable Others to Act include:

FYM 1 states that they believe that their experience as a FOCUS Mentor has assisted them in the development of the characteristic of enabling others to act because, “In this practice, you encourage collaboration by building trust and facilitating

relationships. You also increase competence amongst others.” Returning Mentors also spoke of how their mentorship has helped or encouraged them to develop this practice. RM 8 reported their highest scored practice as enable others to act. This mentor states, “I think as a mentor you really need to encourage students to do their best [especially] when they are having trouble finding their way” (RM 8). RM 16 stated that “I am usually the one who promotes unity and growth overall and that’s what I enjoy most about being a leader.”

Model the Way

3. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.
4. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

Eight of the participating mentors reported model the way as their most commonly used practice. These mentors spoke of doing the right thing (FYM 2), sharing past experiences with mentees (FYM 4, FYM 13, and RM 11), and setting an example for others (FYM 17, FYM 18, RM 4).

FYM 2 reflected that their mentor experience has encouraged them to develop this practice “by doing the right thing” (FYM 2) and showing their mentees the difference between right and wrong. FYM 2 speaks of making sure that their actions and values are portraying the same thing. FYM 4, FYM 13, and RM 11 reported that FOCUS has encouraged them to develop this practice by allowing them to use their own experiences assist mentees. These mentors use their pasts to model the way for mentees. RM 11 shared that “As a FOCUS mentor, I have gotten the chance to work with

students who were in the same major/circumstances I was. Through this, I was able to be a role model...” (RM 11).

FYM 17, FYM 18, and RM 4 discussed how they set examples for their mentees in the hopes of modeling the way for them to succeed in the college setting. RM 4 reflected that they had difficulty defining who they were as a person the previous year and how that has helped them become more confident in the example that they are able to set for mentees. FYM 18 stated that, “As a mentor, I’ve realized how much these students truly look up to us” (FYM 18).

FOCUS mentors have the opportunity to set the example for any and every freshmen they encounter. These students are typically not shy when it comes to voicing their values and most of them strive to ensure that the example they are setting is one that they would want to follow.

Inspire a Shared Vision

5. Envision the future imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
6. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

Sharing what you would like the future to look like can seem like a daunting task on its own, now add in the desire to have others share your vision and assist you on your way. That is what FOCUS mentors are encouraged to do each time they meet a new challenge. Whether mentors need to revise an IFS lesson to better suit their mentees, work to plan a new event, or even just assist a mentee through a crisis, mentors are encouraged to share their visions.

FYM 10 states that “...envisioning the future and enlisting others for help this is important as a mentor...” (FYM 10). FYM 16 says that they utilize inspiring a shared vision by trying to “create a team environment within the block and remind everyone that we are all trying [and] will succeed together...” (FYM 16). RM 9 also discusses the use of inspiring a shared vision by remind others of the goals that have been set by trying “to emphasize working hard academics, staying motivated, etc. in order to accomplish their goals. I think that by being a FOCUS mentor, not only do I remind people about it, it keeps me motivated” (RM 9).

RM 2 and RM 13 use the inspiration of a shared vision in how they work with new situations. RM 2 states that they inspire a shared vision when they begin to plan for an IFS session. RM 2 says that they prepare well before the IFS for fear of something going wrong. Serving as a FOCUS mentor has helped this mentor cope with this fear because they have worked with their mentor team and shared their vision for how they would like for the IFS to go. RM 13 says that because they have worked with FOCUS as a mentor they now have experience with inspiring a variety of people.

Challenge the Process

7. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
8. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15)

While FOCUS mentors tend to be extremely creative and innovative, only three of them reported having scored highest in this practice. Furthermore, of the three who did report having scored highest in this practiced, all of the mentors reported having scored highest on at least one other practice. These mentors mention doing things differently than their peers in order to stand out and improve their mentor practices.

RM 5 reported receiving scores on all five practices, but believes that Challenge the Process is the one they perceive themselves utilizing the most. RM 14 states that they are constantly doing things differently in order to improve their mentoring abilities. RM 14 tries to find ways to motivate their mentees and to get challenge themselves.

While mentoring is a very individualized experience, FOCUS mentors appear not to push the boundaries once they find their comfort zone. Those mentors that do challenge the process are looking for ways to develop themselves as leaders and/or to find new ways to keep mentees engaged in their college experience.

Encourage the Heart

9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p.15)

As with challenge the process, only three FOCUS mentors reported scoring highest in the practice: encourage the heart. However, unlike the three who scored highest in challenge the process, the three mentors in this practice did not share their top ranked practice with another. These three students did not report a tied score. FOCUS mentors serve as a great support system for their mentees. The mentors who reported

having scored highest in this practice reported providing positive reinforcement and acknowledging when a mentee or fellow mentor had done an outstanding job.

FYM 11 states: “I like to encourage my mentees to do great. I definitely like to give them positive reinforcement to go with it” (FYM 11). FYM 12 speaks about recognizing the hard work their mentees put in to completing class assignments, doing well on exams, and taking responsibility for their own academic success. “Encouraging these behaviors can truly help them grow and change for the better” (FYM 12). RM12 stated that encouraging the heart is important because “As a mentor we have to make our mentees (and team members) feel appreciated and accepted for who they are” (RM 12).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study sought to understand how undergraduate students serving as mentors to college freshmen perceived their mentorship as helping to develop their 5 Practices for Exemplary Leadership as defined by Kouzes and Posner (2013). Reflections and Personal-Best Leadership Experiences, written from each FOCUS mentor's perspective and focused on how students perceived their mentorship as assisting in their leadership development, were analyzed for this study.

Each mentor wrote a short reflection on how they perceived their FOCUS mentorship as having helped to develop their highest-scored practice, and asked to reflect on how their FOCUS mentorship had given them the opportunity to develop the practice they perceived themselves utilizing most frequently. Each students' Personal-Best Leadership Experience also showed that FOCUS mentors believe that their mentorship is allowing them to utilize and enhance these 5 leadership practices. In all but one reflection, mentor responses exhibited evidence of at least one of the 5 Practices being used during their Personal-Best Leadership Experience within the context of FOCUS.

FOCUS mentors utilize transformational leadership during their time as FOCUS mentors. These students begin to explore effective ways of interacting with peers and mentees effectively, using goal setting as a form of planning and direction, and provide

motivation (Hater & Bass, 1988; Strong, Wynn, Irby, & Linder, 2013; Tourish, 2008; Yammarino & Bass, 1990). Kouzes and Posner (2014) provide 10 commitment of exemplary leadership, two commitments per practice. These commitments assist in understanding what the 5 Practices mean when students are developing these practices. This study found that in order to serve their mentees and teammates, mentors take time to get to know the needs of those around them and what can be done to meet those needs. Mentors who reported that their highest scored practice as Model the Way described setting an example and sharing past experiences to help others avoid the same mistakes. Mentors provide a source of encouragement for students as made evident by their reflections pertaining to encouraging mentees who were uncertain in their decision to attend Texas A&M University and encouraging mentees to participate in FOCUS and campus activities.

As for goal setting and motivation, mentors use transformational leadership especially in challenging the process and enabling others to act. Mentors take the time get to know each of their mentees on a personal level as well as in group settings. They are getting to know what motivates mentees to continue in school, reach goals, and strive for success. Mentors strive to encourage mentees to be more and do more than they thought possible.

Komives et al. (2005) in their study *Developing a Leadership Identity*, found in their model that there are five key categories that students encountered before they were able to transition from the first stage of awareness to the sixth stage of integration/synthesis. This study found that two of these five categories were more

prevalent in the data than others. The categories of developing self (Category 2) and group influences (Category 3). Mentors that in their Personal-Best Leadership Experience shared similar traits to enabling others to act and modeling the way are examples of mentors that are developing themselves. Based on findings in the data, these mentors are learning to work in groups and creating open and inclusive environments. Mentors who showed similarities to challenging the process in their Personal-Best Leadership Experience are those mentors who are changing their view of themselves (Category 4). These mentors are beginning to challenge their view of themselves as bystanders and beginning to look for creativity and innovation. These mentors reflected taking on new responsibility and changing processes within the FOCUS Learning Community. For these mentors, particularly those who discussed creating new lesson plans and/or changing the process of a FOCUS procedure, this means that they are no longer idle participants and that they are taking ownership of their leadership experience. These instances are also evidence that the leadership identities of mentors are progressing and broadening (Category 5) (Komives et al, 2005).

FOCUS mentors exhibited evidence of moving through Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors (1993) themselves and/or assisting their freshmen mentees as they gain competencies in these vectors. For FOCUS mentors, the three vectors that they appear to gain the most competence in are: developing competence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and establishing identity. At the beginning of a student's mentorship, they are cast into a high active and quickly adapting environment.

These students must quickly learn the processes and culture of the organization, they must learn how to complete administrative tasks, and are expected to keep up with the ever-evolving needs of their students.

FOCUS mentors also develop competence in several of the vectors from Chickering and Reisser's (1993) *Education and Identity* (specifically Developing Competence, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, and Developing Identity). Typically, when a new mentor begins serving the learning community, there is a level of hesitancy in completing administrative tasks because they have not seen the task completed. Undergraduate students gain competence in their interpersonal relationships as their mentoring experience progresses. In the Personal-Best Leadership Experience reflections, 12 Returning Mentors of the 16 participating mentors reflected that their experience took place outside the context of an IFS, while only 8 of the 18 First-Year Mentors reflected within the same context. Based on the data, this could be due in part to the fact that Returning Mentors are further along in the developing competence in administrative tasks such as proctoring an IFS and are able to focus on developing mature interpersonal relationships. Mentors begin to develop relationships with fellow mentors and mentees. There is generally some nervousness in mentors at the beginning of this stage in development because mentors do not know what to expect from these relationships. As they move toward developing a higher competency in this vector they gain confidence in their ability to interact and connect with a wide variety of their peers. It should stand to reason that spending more time in their role as a FOCUS peer mentor,

mentors feel more competent in their ability to complete tasks and develop relationships.

The ability to develop mature interpersonal relationships is a desired trait in FOCUS mentors. FOCUS students appear to be very competent in this vector. FOCUS encourages students to gain awareness of different groups on the campus of Texas A&M University. When mentors and mentees begin to know more about each other, mentors begin to gain awareness and develop tolerance of others. First-year mentors may, at times, be nervous about interacting with mentees because they may not be as far developed in this vector as experienced mentors. Developing strong relationships with their mentees allows mentors to better understand what a mentee may need and how they can be better served. This is a skill that mentors gain with time and practice.

Mentors have a great deal of responsibility. They serve as role models for first-generation freshmen, teach a weekly seminar, and plan and implement activities for mentees. Along the way, they begin to discover parts of mentoring they very much enjoy and parts of mentoring that they do not. They begin to find their voice when working in a team setting and become more comfortable with who they are as mentors, but also as humans. These undergraduate mentors begin to further develop their sense of identity.

In this study, Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) explains what mentors are experiencing during certain aspects of their roles. Mentors become extremely engaged in their own learning processes in the FOCUS Learning Community as they begin to make connections between formal education and real-world experiences. They

use this developing connection when they plan and facilitate seminar activities and assist mentees.

For mentors, reflective observation (Kolb, 1984) comes in two main forms, one being the weekly synopsis that each mentor team must submit after their IFS has been completed for the week. Mentors reflect on the seminar and note what went well, what needs to be improved, provide performance feedback for peers, note the involvement level of the freshmen, and denote any other information that students would like a staff member to be aware of. This practice allows mentors to develop observation and communication skills. The second form of reflective observation is the reflection and evaluation completed at the end of each formal mentor training. During this time mentors are asked what they learned during the training, if there was anything they would have done differently, and if there is anything that they would like further information over. This allows mentors to gauge what they learned during the training and if there is something that they need to know more about in order to be effective mentors.

With the observations provided by mentors, abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 1984) is used when coordinators and mentors review observations and reflections to put suggestions into action. FOCUS mentors are asked how they would like to improve and what suggestions they have based on comments provided.

The fourth and final stage in Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) is active experimentation. Mentors learn by active experimentation during FOCUS trainings and while actually facilitating the weekly seminar that their mentees attend.

FOCUS mentors are encouraged to try new activities and ideas when attempting to engage with mentees. In this stage of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984), mentors experiment with creativity in a safe and encouraging environment. In this stage mentors learn about risk assessment in an environment that provides them with coordinator guidance. For example, mentors who reflected on encouraging the heart and enabling others to act are mentors who are working to build relationships based on trust and appreciation. It may take some experimentation for a mentor to learn how to give or gain trust, as well as how to express gratitude for a job well done. Within the FOCUS Learning Community, mentors are able to experiment with these practices.

FOCUS Learning Community utilized Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) as a way for mentors to become fully immersed in their leaning process. From the introduction on a new topic or concept, to seeing it in action and discussing it, to putting the new concept/idea into action for themselves, FOCUS encourages mentors to build on past experiences in order to grow and develop. Mentors were able to use the reflective skills that they have honed in FOCUS to critically reflect on their experiences for the purpose of this study, and will be able to transfer that skill to areas outside of their FOCUS mentorship.

Based on what mentors shared in their responses, FOCUS Learning Community is allowing mentors to grow and develop as individuals and should continue to use the processes and culture currently being utilized. FOCUS Learning Community should also continue to encourage reflection and experimentation within their mentors. The continuation of reflection will allow FOCUS staff to better understand what mentors are

learning in situations and if changes are required to provide a new challenge or growth opportunity. For mentors, reflection is a way for them to synthesize what they have learned and discuss their new knowledge with their peers. Active experimentation is one way that FOCUS can encourage mentors to continue to inspire shared visions and challenge process. Mentors are able to push boundaries and learn limitations when they are given the freedom to create new lesson plans, plan new events, or re-organize an established procedure.

This study found that mentors serving the FOCUS Learning Community do attribute at least some of their leadership development to their mentoring experience. It has been found that, in this study, Personal-Best Leadership Experiences took place in one of two contexts: within the IFS setting and outside of the context of IFS. Mentors appear to perceive themselves as role models for their mentees, and take this role very seriously. Mentors also reflected inspiring their mentees in times of difficulty and the importance of goal setting within their mentor teams. Providing information on campus process to mentees and enabling them to act for themselves was reflected upon in other contexts by more several mentors. Encouraging the heart and challenging the process, although the two practices least reflected upon, are by no means of any less importance. Based on the data, students who reflected upon one these two practices were seeking innovation and creativity. FOCUS mentors reflected that their time as mentors has assisted them in the development of each of the 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes and Posner, 2014). The mentors of the FOCUS Learning Community,

collectively exhibited evidence of all five practices, and reflected that their participation as a FOCUS mentor assisted them in their development as leaders in some way.

Recommendations

This study looked at a very specific group of undergraduate students, who serve a specific purpose (assist first-generation freshmen as they adjust to college life). It is recommended that further study be conducted to evaluate if undergraduate mentors from different universities or serving different populations of students will yield similar results.

Based on the findings of this study, FOCUS Learning Community is allowing undergraduate students the opportunity to develop their leadership styles and competences within their roles as mentors. FOCUS provides at least 10 formal training sessions per academic year in order to expose mentors to many facets of personal, professional, and leadership development and allows them an opportunity to share best practices in large group settings. The FOCUS Learning Community should seek to continue to provide formal leadership education for its mentors. FOCUS also appears to impress upon its mentors the importance of modeling the way. Many mentors reflected upon times when, even though other practices were being used, modeling the way was the practice that served as the foundation for many interactions.

FOCUS Learning Community, in the interest in developing well-rounded leaders, should begin to find ways to encourage mentors to challenge the process more often. Based on reflections shared by mentors, this is a practice that mentors least referred to. Based on prolonged engagement and observation, mentors may be hesitant

to challenge the process due to a lack of confidence in their own ideas. FOCUS should look for ways to encourage and incorporate mentor ideas into training and FOCUS procedures. Allowing mentors to make changes to processes and/or decide what activities should be organized for their students may help mentors gain confidence in challenging processes.

Due to the fact that this study examined mentors with varying levels of experience (First-Year Mentors and Returning Mentors) for similar leadership development experiences, with little regard to how the First-Year Mentor responses differed from the Returning Mentor responses, further research needs to be done on how longevity as a mentor may impact perceptions of leadership development in regards to the 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

This study utilized content analysis of two different reflections, not allowing for follow-up questions. Future studies could be done to continue the examination of how undergraduate students in a mentor role perceive their mentorship as assisting to develop their leadership qualities.

As the data for this study began to emerge into themes there was great evidence of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors. It would be beneficial to the body of leadership development literature to examine the seven vectors in relation to mentors and if those undergraduate students who serve as mentors show evidence of moving along certain vectors at a faster rate than their peers who do not serve as mentors.

Finally, further studies should address the benefit that being a mentor has on undergraduate students, as well as the benefits of having a peer mentor as an

undergraduate student. Research conducted to determine whether or not the mentor experience is symbiotic could encourage institutions of higher education to utilize peer mentor programs.

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